US continues assaults No river training plan on Iraqi militants

REUTERS, Baghdad

US-led forces yesterday pressed on with a major offensive against suspected guerrilla targets near the northern Iraqi town of Samarra in their latest bid to weaken a raging insurgency, witnesses said.

The raids came as Iraq's political leadership prepares to meet again in an effort to break a deadlock on forming a unity government that might avert

Involving 50 helicopters, it was the biggest "air assault" since a similar airlift across Iraq, also by the 101st Airborne Division, just after the war in late April 2003, US military officials

Iraqi Defence Ministry spokesman General Salih Sarhan criticized the attention being given to the assault, describing it as one of many operations aimed at rooting out rebels and seizing weapons.

"This operation is not an invasion and the media have overreacted. The operation aims to search and control the area and launch raids against some suspected places," he said.

The sound of what appeared to be heavy US machineguns crackled in the village of Jillaam overnight as a fire raged and flares arched overhead, the witnesses said

The chant of "God is Greatest" - a guerrilla rallying cry -- cut through the heavy sound of gunfire.

But there was no sign of a counter attack by insurgents who have kept Iraq destabilised despite several American assaults in several parts of the country torn apart by sectarian

Burns told reporters

capability," he added.

Iranian government.

deadlock on Iran.

nuclear ambitions.

US rules out

"We see an Iranian government,

particularly since (President

Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad came to

office, that seems bound and deter-

mined to create a nuclear weapons

"We have made the calculation

. that it is better to try to isolate the

Burns said he was confident that

A State Department official said

the UN Security Council will suc-

ceed in reaching agreement on

Burns and his counterparts from

China, Russia, France, Britain, and

Germany would meet in New York

on Monday to try and break the

dential statement on Iran." the

official, who requested anonymity,

told AFP. He was referring to efforts

by the five permanent members of

the Security Council, who have veto

power, to reach consensus on a

statement condemning Iran's

approved by all 15 members of the

Council. Iran says its nuclear ambi-

tions are peaceful and denies it is

Earlier Thursday, both the US

seeking nuclear weapons.

Any such statement needs to be

"They plan to finalize the presi-

appropriate action against Iran.

A Sunni Arab politician criticised the US assault, saying it would send a discouraging signal at a time when Iraqi leaders are seeking a political solution to the country's woes.

'This large operation that used airplanes is sending a signal to parliament and Iragis that the solution is military and not political." he said.

It was not clear if US and Iragi troops had also attacked other parts of their target area northeast of Samarra.

The city 100km north of the capital where the destruction of an important Shia Muslim shrine on February 22 sparked days of reprisals and prompted fears of civil war

The military also said 41 insurgents had been detained and weapons had been found in "Operation Swarmer" and that the mission would last for several days.

The assault was announced on Thursday after a first session of the new Iragi parliament was reduced to an empty gesture by deadlock on forming a unity government seen as vital to avert civil war.

Signs of movement to end the paralysis did emerge, however, when US and Iranian officials said they could set aside years of hostility to discuss Iraq. And Iraqi political sources said a new alliance of parties may be formed in hope of a breakthrough.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari was quick to portray the military operation as proof of the growing abilities of Iraqi troops key to US hopes of bringing home troops.

Urging the formation of a unity government, the US commander in

Atghan bandits uty have been critically wounded and

the Middle East said the United States

should be able to continue to cut its

own troop levels if Iraqi forces show

"I think the general trend, given

legitimate government emerging, will

be Iragis do more, we do less, and

eventually more reductions come

to the 20-minute formality that was the

first sitting of parliament on Thursday

since December's election. It was held

Sunnis and Kurds and some Shias

are trying to block the nomination of

Shia Prime Minister al-Jaafari to a

second term, paralysing politics in the

As a result, parliament was unable

even to elect a speaker at its first

session as demanded by the constitu-

tion. In a bit of legal sleight of hand, the

"first" session was not adjourned and

will reconvene at some point once a

package deal involving the posts of

speaker, president, prime minister and

key cabinet members has been struck,

to meet a constitutional deadline.

The action at Samarra contrasted

about." General John Abizaid said.

both are in intensive care in hospital." According to some Iranian news agencies, Nouri and his deputy were shot several times in the chest and abdomen.

The interior ministry source, speaking on condition of anonymity, added that "apparently a number of people have been taken hostage.

"Iran is seriously pursuing the case, and that's why the head of police is here to command the search for the bandits," he added.

Zahedan after attending a ceremony of war commanders in Zabol, the reports added "A number of victim's families

The officials were returning to

have told us that their relatives have been taken hostage, but we cannot confirm it yet," he added. Iran's police commander

Brigadier General Esmail Ahmadi-Mogaddam, told state television "we have information that the bandits in Sistan-Baluchistan area had some meetings with the British and the American security services.

"These services have dictated plans to the bandits on how to destabilise the area. They are trying to spread disputes between Shiites and Sunnis. This is a terrorist action against innocent civilians," he told reporters upon arriving at Zahedan's

Ahmadi-Moqaddam said the bandits had killed Shiites, who were stopped at a mock checkpoint.

There is the possibility that the bandits have escaped to Afghanistan since the area is close to the border, he added.

Sistan-Baluchistan, a mostly Sunni Muslim province in predominantly Shiite Iran, is notoriously lawless and is a key transit route for opium and other drugs from Afghanistan and Pakistan headed for Europe and the Gulf.

Some three month ago, a group of Iranian soldiers was kidnapped near the border with Pakistan by a hardline Sunni Muslim group operating in the unruly border area. They were later

Iranian officials and media had initially said the kidnappers were bandits, drug traffickers or dissident

Bangladesh will encourage such

Asked about Dhaka's view on the

proposed India-Myanmar gas pipeline

through Bangladesh, Hemayatuddin

said the matter would be discussed if it

s raised at the meeting between

between India and Bangladesh in the

field of energy considering that that

country has large gas reserves, he

cited his country's rapidly growing

"We have to decide how much we

He said the Indo-Bangla relations

With regard to reports of rising

fundamentalism in the country

Bangladesh relations, including border

issue, security-related matters, trade

and sharing of water of common rivers

would be discussed when Khaleda

holds talks with Indian Premier

Manmohan Singh on March 21. said

On the possibility of cooperation

FROM PAGE 1

moves, he observed.

Khaleda and Singh.

'minor" disputes

any of its activities," said an energy Tax barriers

Dhaka Clean Fuel Project. Niko later paid Titas for the pipes but in local currency while the pipes were procured with foreign currency.

in future.

chased land around the Feni gas field area for future development. chopped over 500 trees there and has done different work 'in

'advance' work at Tengratila or Chhatak gas field. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) recently approved a \$10-million work programme of Niko for Tengratila gas field. Sources said most of the work has 'already been done' and a large chunk of the recently granted

agreement (JVA) with Bapex, which provided the Canadian company gateway to three gas fields of Feni, Kamta and Chhatak, all its work programmes should be approved by the JRC and the JMC consisting of Bapex and Niko officials

The JVA also dictates that all payments should go to a joint bank account of Niko and Bapex. But Niko influenced the then state minister for energy to force Petrobangla to pay \$4 million to its (Niko's) bank account in April 2005.

itself has been a creation of the previous state minister, who forced Petrobangla to start taking gas from this field in November 2004 without fixing gas price. The state minister also pressurised Petrobangla to pay Niko \$2.35 per unit of gas while Petrobangla found the Feni gas was

The October 2003 Niko-Bapex JVA was made on the basis of unsolicited negotiation and in violation of a number of government policies. Niko was disqualified by the government in the Second Round Block Bidding for oil and gas exploration under PSCs in 1997.

government demanded 8.9 bcf gas respond to this demand.

the riverbeds and thus is decreasing the navigability of these rivers.

The government, however, is yet to take any long-term master plan and proper strategy for "river training" to protect the riverbanks from erosion, causing most of its measures to go wasted. "River training" mainly aims at

modelling the proper river flow regime facilitating bank protection, channel flow, navigation and other aspects through dredging and other

Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed admitted that it is essential to take a countrywide river training plan, especially setting up embankments on both sides of these rivers as in China.

"We realise its importance but we cannot take up such huge projects due to budget constraint," he told The Daily Star, stressing the need for more budgetary allocation for his

Experts suggested that the authority first identify the probable erosion prone points one year in advance to facilitate planning of necessary monitoring and maintenance against possible adversities to the safety of the riverbanks.

The government should also consult with neighbouring India in this regard, said Dr M Monowar Hossain, professor of water resources engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet). He also stressed the need for learning the behaviour of the rivers through proper research and largescale surveys.

The Water Development Board (WDB) constructs a number of embankments in different parts of the country every year. But these structures can hardly survive the force of erosion let alone protect the banks as they are built mostly during the rainy season.

"The WDB knows that it needs some time for the embankments to get hardened, yet they do the construction work during the rainy season. This is nothing but a sheer waste of resources. The best time for the work is winter," Monowar

Protection measures taken by the government have not lasted long as all such measures were taken without proper planning and the protection measures become extinct within two to five years.

Jamuna-Meghna River Erosion Mitigation Project (JMREMP) team leader Knut Oberhagemann said the local WDB sends the proposals for protection measures to the water resources ministry after the erosion has already started. "It takes around one to five years to get the proposals approved. But in the meantime, the erosion point has shifted to elsewhere." he said.

"It is very disappointing that most of the river protection steps taken by the government are wasted due to bureaucratic tangle," Knut said.

The experts have, meanwhile found that the Jamuna, Padma and lower Meghna have been undergoing dynamic changes since the last decade. A CEGIS study of a temporal series of satellite images found that these rivers are widening at a very high annual rate, ranging between 160m and 250m.

THE JAMUNA

The upper part of the 240km-long Jamuna from the Indo-Bangladesh border to Kazipur of Sirajganj has been widening at a rate of around 150m a year while the lower part from Kazipur to the confluence with the Padma near Aricha has been widening around 140m a year since

The Jamuna eroded 87,790 hectare land over the last three decades while the total amount of land accretion was 12,490 hectare. THE PADMA

The total erosion by the 90km-long Padma during this period was 29.390 hectare while land accretion was 4,800 hectare

During 2001-2004, the Padma alone eroded the rural area along its 30.7km banks, engulfing 3,300 hectares of land--260 hectares of settlement and 1,200 hectare agricultural land, according to the

THE LOWER MEGHNA

Around 24,137 hectare land was eroded along the 90km banks of the lower Meghna from Chandpur to the northern tip of Hatia during 1984-2003 while land accretion was just 1,936 hectare. The river widened 169m on average per year, the CEGIS survey mentioned

Bombs blasted

operation. He. however, declined

to divulge the identity of the two. "The first bomb went off before time near some policemen. And minutes after, the other suicide bomber carried out the attack

successfully," Saimul quoted Rahman as saying. He said Mawa is the main den of militants in greater Mymensingh region and over 200 JMB operatives led by Moulana

Abdur Razzak are still active "Although my men arrested

Sanaullah and Sumon, we've failed to net the others due to noncooperation of Gouripur police, added the police officer.

He said police will interrogate Bangla Bhai too in this connection once the doctors release him from

3 CASES AGAINST **BANGLA BHAI**

Three more cases were filed with Raninagar Police Station in Naogaon Thursday against Bangla Bhai and his 52 accomplices, reports BDNEWS.

According to first information reports (FIR) of two cases, Sufal and Sushanta of Chapta village have been missing since they were abducted by cadres of Bangla Bhai on May 12 and 13 in 2004.

Fathers of the two youths filed the cases 22 months after the incidents.

Rafigul Islam of Vote village in Raninagar filed the other case against Bangla Bhai and his vigilante gang for maiming him on April 15, 2004 BANGLA BHAI YET TO BE

QUIZZED Meanwhile, the investigators have yet to begin quizzing Siddigul Islam alias Bangla Bhai. JMB Shura member and lieutenant of the militant chief. He is still undergoing treatment at Bangladesh Rifles hospital in Dhaka for burns and other injuries he sustained during his capture in Rampur village of Muktagachha,

Mymensingh on March 6. Sources in the Rab said he will be taken to Mymensingh and produced before a court to be placed on remand.

"Doctors are yet to release him. We thought he would be released by Thursday but he was not," Commander Masug Hassan Ahmed, director of Rab Legal and Media Wing, told The Daily Star. On getting a remand order

from court, members of the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) will interrogate him at Rab-1 office in Uttara. The TFI members have been

continuing quizzing Rahman under a 10-day remand, Commander Masug added BANGLA BHAI'S WIFE REMANDED FURTHER

Bangla Bhai's wife Fahima

Khatun, arrested a couple of

hours before the capture of his husband, was placed on a 12-day fresh remand by a Mymensingh court yesterday, reports our Mymensingh correspondent. On completion of a 10-day

remand at the TFI, Fahima was produced before the court of First Class Magistrate Rokshana The court ordered the law

enforcers to interrogate her for seven days in explosives case and five days in arms case. Both wara filad Muktagachha Police Station after Rab captured Bangla Bhai and recovered huge firearms and explosives from Rampur.

BRAHMANBARIA PROBE

Police yesterday picked up Shafigul Islam from Kautoli area of Brahmanbaria town for suspected links with militants.

Shafig was held after four JMB activists of the district, who were captured Wednesday, told interrogators that he knows a lot about JMB activities and network The police continued interro-

gating the four -- Sohel, Alamgir, Arafat and Sheikh Mohammad -on the second day of their five-day remand vesterday

Wednesday by the BDR, our

NILPHAMARIARREST Domar police of Nilphamari yes-

terday arrested field-level JMB activist Abdul Jalil at Pramanikpara, acting on the village houses. information obtained from two JMB activists rounded up

Nilphamari correspondent adds. Nilphamari SP Shoeb Ahmed said all three arrestees have given some significant informa-

Police in speedboats and villag-Caretaker system

Workers Party chief Rashed Khan

Menon stressed putting the armed forces under the caretaker government during its tenure, as proposed by the 14-party opposition combine. Otherwise, the election will be manipulated, he added.

Former US ambassador to Bangladesh William B Milam, who was scheduled to talk on the issue could not do so on health grounds. In a message, he said, "Free and fair elections are critically important for the future of democracy in Bangladesh and for the whole region."

Milam, now a senior policy scholar at Woodrow Wilson Centre in Washington, hoped all the parties will come together to ensure that the process of democracy continues to take a deeper root in Bangladesh.

Others who spoke included BILIA Director Wali-ur-Rahman and Forest E Cookson, economist at Research and Development

Bangladesh cross 300-run

After South Africa's historic runchase against Australia last week no total looks defendable these days but the Bangladeshi bowlers were too good for the ICC associate members and ensured normalcy return in the shorter-version game.

Left-arm seamer Syed Rasel initiated an early collapse picking up three wickets and Kenya never recovered before being dismissed for 170 in 48.1 overs. Although Nafees and Aftab set

the platform, it was Mashrafee Bin

Mortuza whose stunning fireworks enabled Bangladesh to cross the 300-mark for the first time and claim their twelfth ODI win second against the East Africans in eight meetings. The 22-year old pace bowler

popularly known as the Narail Express, took only 16 balls to score his highest one-day total of 44 not out that contained five fours and three massive sixes against Jimmy

Ongondo, who conceded 23 runs in the last over. Mashrafee's explosive knock, which helped Bangladesh rattle 101 runs in the last nine overs, came agonisingly close to equal Sri Lankan opener Sanath Jayasuriya's one-day record of a 17-ball fifty.

Earlier, lady luck once again smiled on Habibul Bashar as the Bangladesh captain maintained his hundred percent coin successes since Sri Lanka's tour and decided to bat first on a true batting track Javed Omar and Nafees gave

Bangladesh a flying start putting on 92 runs but the former fell to a doubtful third-umpire decision when Steve Tikolo palmed the ball at cover. TV replays were inconclusive whether the ball had carried.

Javed's departure after a sedate 53-ball 28, however, seemed to be a blessing as Aftab accelerated the run-rate with his natural stroke-play during a 69-ball 62 with help of three fours and two sixes.

Left-handed opener Nafees was unlucky to fall nine runs short of what would have been his maiden one-day hundred when the man-ofthe-match failed to return to the nonstriking while trying to steal a single against Tikolo's perfect throw.

The southpaw, who surpassed his previous best of 75 against Australia capitalising the power play advantage superbly, smashed eleven well-timed fours in his 112-

Bashar decision to not come out and send Mohammad Rafique at number five proved a wise decision as the veteran left-hander responded with three fours and a six to score 36 off 25 balls.

The two teams meet in the second game in Khulna on March 20.

Probe if anyone in govt

these groups. Last year, Abu Hena, a BNP lawmaker, was reportedly expelled after he accused some government ministers of fostering the rise of Bangla Bhai in his constituency in northern Bagmara Upazila, the statement said.

"I tried to stop them and I wanted help from the government but some ministers and some MPs, for their own political advantages, did not want to stop the Islamic extremists." the internationally reputed human rights organisation quoted Hena

It is the responsibility of the government to investigate anyone against whom there are allegations of involvement in the bombings. including the two top bosses of JMB. with a view to establishing the truth. the statement said. "However, such investigation

must at all times conform to interna-

tional human rights standards and

be free from any act of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," the statement continued. "The investigation must extend to anyone in the government or [to anyone] linked to the ruling coalition parties [who were] likely to have provided political shelter to the bombers for personal or political gains," it said. "If those investigated can be charged, they should be brought to justice in compliance with

without recourse to the death pen-According to media reports, the government has now admitted that these Islamist groups have also been involved in a number of other human rights abuses. These include attacks against individuals known to Amnesty International as human rights defenders, it added. The revelation by the govern-

ment on March 9, 2006 that JMB had been responsible for the attacks against Dhaka University professor Humayun Azad and Rajshahi University professor Dr Yunus in 2004 opens a new chapter in addressing these human rights abuses, said the statement.

"However, it also highlights the government's unexplained failure so far to fully investigate these and other attacks against human rights defenders and to bring those involved in the attacks to justice," it added. Similarly, the government's

recent statement that the bomb blasts in four cinemas in Mymensingh in December 2002 were carried out by the militant group must be seen as a clear vindication of those writers, academicians and opposition politicians who were subjected to arrests and ill-treatment on allegations of involvement in the bomb blasts, the statement said.

Citing the detentions of prominent writer Shahriar Kabir, university professor Muntassir Mamoon, Awami League politician Saber Hossain Chowdhury, and journalist Enamul Haque Chowdhury following the Mymensingh bomb blasts, Al said it considered the detentions politically motivated.

"They were reportedly ill-treated while in police custody and had a series of unsubstantiated criminal charges framed against them. They have claimed that they were being forced to confess to involvement in the Mymensingh bomb blasts, a charge they have always refuted the statement said.

"Their detention and the government's persistent denial that slamist groups were responsible for the blasts appeared to be not only a move by the government to intimidate its critics, but also helped to divert the course of justice and effectively, provided impunity from prosecution to the actual perpetrators of the bomb blasts," it said.

Al urged the Government of Bangladesh to provide full redress to the falsely accused and other people who were subjected to politically motivated detentions during that time. Such redress should in the first instance include the withdrawal of the charges against them, including sedition

charges, it added Al also urged the government to recognise that under international human rights law, anyone who has been a victim of unlawful arrest or detention shall have an enforceable

40 injured as storm lashes Kalaroa

UNB. Satkhira

At least 40 people were injured and 300 houses damaged as storm lashed 20 villages in Kalaroa upazila of Satkhira district vester-

Locals said the storm hit the

villages under Joynagar, Jalalabad and Jugikhali unions at around 5:00pm and lasted for an hour, uprooting a large number of trees and electric poles

It also caused extensive damage to standing Irri-boro crops. The injured were admitted to the upazila health complex.

Quake triggers

after waves as high as five metres (16.5 feet) swept away at least 116

Most of the village's 1,200 residents had fled to the hills to escape the tsunami, Lumbessy was quoted as saying

The quake, which rocked several islands in the eastern Indonesian province of Maluku, also damaged hundreds of homes in five other villages on Buru island. the paper said.

ers in wooden fishing boats were still searching for three missing children, the Detikcom online news agency reported.

A six-year-old girl, a toddler and an eight-month-old baby were feared dead, after the tsunami hit Batu Jungku village, which sits just 300 metres (yards) from the beach.

Indonesia's Aceh province was devastated by a tsunami, which hit nations around the Indian Ocean after being triggered by a 9.3magnitude quake off Sumatra island. Some 168,000 Acehnese were killed. Indonesia sits on the Pacific

'Ring of Fire", where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity. Maluku province lies at the meeting point of the country's two main chains of volcanoes.

During the authoritarian rule of project. former President Suharto, Buru The communications ministry island was a prison colony where officials told The Daily Star that when dissident lawyers, professors and asked about the terms and conditions activists suspected of being comof the donors' money, Reza could not munists were held.

Subway train

Huda told The Daily Star. "We are trying at least to start the

According to sources, since assuming power in 2001 the fourparty alliance government has been seeking foreign investment for underground railway to relieve the city dwellers of nagging traffic conges-

The Russian ambassador to Bangladesh had called on the communications minister and said the country wanted to assist Bangladesh in developing an underground railway in the city. A technical team from Russia had visited Dhaka to examine the technical aspects of the project.

Bangladesh Railway had opened an international tender in February 2003, seeking proposals from foreign companies to set up the railway on Only two companies had submit-

ted proposals in the tender. But the government could not go far with the plan as both the proposals were non-Out of the two proposals, one was submitted by a local company and the other by an American company. The local Contech Ltd had proposed

to build a 45-kilometre underground

single circular rail track from

Saidabad to Gabtoli at a cost of Tk 2.000 crore. The American company had auoted Tk 6.000 crore for the job. but it did not elaborate on its proposal. said a communications ministry

official. "We did not get any response from the American company when we sought details of the proposal," said a high official of the ministry.

The local company though submitted the details, its response on various gueries from the government were not satisfactory. The proposal of Contech Limited said the project would be implemented with financial assistance from Japan and other multilateral donor agencies like the World Bank.

"If our proposal is accepted, we will implement it without requiring any financial involvement of the government," Masud Reza, managing director of the company, was quoted as telling the government officials at an appraisal meeting on the proposal

He also said he had already discussed the matter with the World Bank and other donor agencies and they had assured him of financing the Outlaw found

give any satisfactory answer.

Besides, its proposal of setting up

Contech had proposed to con-

struct the subway system in three

vears' time and hand it over to the

government after 19 years of opera-

the subway in a 'cut and paste sys-

city like Dhaka, the official added.

Police on March 16 arrested PRCP outlaw Touhid Shaikh, 32, at Kajidghata village with a pipegun with two bullets and Gurupada Dhali, 35, cadre of outlawed New Biplabi Communist Party (NBCP), at Baroikati village in Dumuria

The police said Touhid is wanted in several murder cases and is a close aide to BDR Altaf, operations commander of Janajuddha. Meanwhile, Rapid Action

Battalion (Rab), police and different intelligence agencies hunting for Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Tapan, founder of Janajuddha, in 10 districts in Khulna Division. Jhenidah police declared Tk 50,000 bounty on him last year.

Sources said Tapan had plastic

surgery to change his appearance. He is now busy regrouping his party

cadres in preparation for taking revenge against the killings of his men in crossfire. ' killed Our Sirajganj correspondent reported that a goods-laden truck hit

FROM PAGE 16

a rickshaw from behind at Shahzadpur on the Bogra-Nagarbari highway yesterday morning, killing the rickshaw-puller on the spot and injuring two passengers of the vehicle. Police recovered the body of rickshawpuller Ujjal, 28, and sent it to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital for

autopsy. The identity of the injured passengers, who were admitted to Shahzadpur heath complex, could not be known as of 6:00pm yester-Meanwhile, a female pedestrian

was killed in a road accident at Motijheel in the capital yesterday. Police said Razia Begum, 45,

died on the spot when a black taxicab rammed her near AGB Colony She was crossing the road, police

dor to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, was Niko flouting rules

taken so far. The Canadian company has not also been punished for the pipeline scam although a Petrobangla probe committee found gross anomalies in the deal, including the way it which were purchased for the Asian

During Niko's pipeline construc-

Besides, Niko has illegally puradvance', sources mentioned. The company has done similar

money was spent last year. "No activities of Niko is transpar

ministry official.

The Feni gas field controversy

worth a maximum of \$1.75 per unit.

Niko's inefficient and negligent operation led to two blowouts in Tengratila gas field last year. The and a bank guarantee of Tk 250 crore as blowout compensation and for further drilling there. Niko is yet to

"authorized to speak with Iranians about issues specifically related to If US-Iranian negotiations were to occur on Iraq or any subject, it would be the first direct talks since Washington broke ties with Tehran in April 1980 in the wake of the

70 Americans were taken hostage at the US embassy in Tehran. The last time the two sides sat at the same table was in 2001 in a room with seven other countries. including Russia, for discussions

Islamic revolution that ousted the

US-backed Shah, and since some

about Afghanistan. Until now, the arch-rivals have resisted a dialogue on Iraq, despite Iran's strong ties to the major Shia parties who dominate Baghdad's political scene, and the growing violence that threatens to rip Iraq

Deputy State Department

spokesman Adam Ereli said the

discussions with Tehran on the Iraq

issue would likely focus on concerns expressed in the past by the US administration that Iran was seeking to undermine its efforts in Iraq. "Iran is doing things in Iraq that we don't think are helpful or support-

and Iran expressed willingness to ive of Iraq." Ereli said. "Ambassador engage in discussions about the Khalilzad is authorized to raise situation in Iraq. McClellan said the US ambassathose matters directly with the Iranians in Iraq.'

ministry but no action has been secured Titas company's pipes Development Bank (ADB)-funded

tion, Tengratila gas field was burning due to a blowout, and within a month of construction of the pipeline, a second blowout took place Again, the pipeline itself is not even suitable for high-pressure gas supply as required from a gas field point. It has been a total waste of money that Niko plans to retrieve from Tengratila's development cost

ent. We have received allegations from Bapex that Niko does not take approval of the Joint Review Committee (JRC) or the Joint Management Committee (JMC) for According to Niko's joint venture

energy requirements because of fast need. Then whoever offers a price, we will be ready to sell," he said, adding it was not any country-specific went beyond economic ties and noted the two neighbours have throughout been living cordially despite some

Hemayatuddin said Bangladesh would not allow extremist elements to survive and a campaign had already started against them. India is likely to raise its concerns with regard to 'existence of North East insurgent camps in Bangladesh' and illegal migration from the country' The entire gamut of India-

the Bangladesh foreign secretary. Khaleda Zia will be accompanied by among others Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister Reaz Rahman. and a business delegation.